



September 14, 2022

The Honorable Alex Padilla, Chair
Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship,
and Border Safety
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Cornyn, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship,
and Border Safety
United States Senate
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Dear Chairman Padilla, Ranking Member Cornyn and Subcommittee Members:

Thank you for holding this important hearing, **"Flatlining Care: Why Immigrants Are Crucial to Bolstering Our Health Care Workforce"**. We are pleased to submit a statement for the record to share the views of the senior living industry on the very important issue of workforce shortages in the long-term care industry. As you consider proposals to address shortages in the health care industry through immigration reform, it is critical that you include the senior living front line, caregiver, in demand and other essential workers who care for and service our nations older Americans. Senior living plays a significant role in the greater health care system and these workers are key to maintaining health and wellbeing of the residents they serve, thereby reducing the need for more critical services or hospitalization. When residents are safe, the overall health care system benefits.

The American Senior Housing Association (ASHA) is a national organization of over 500 companies involved in the operation, development, investment, and financing of the entire spectrum of seniors housing – independent living, assisted living, memory care, and Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRCs). Our members' communities serve a wide range of seniors, from those who require assistance with activities of daily living (ADL) such as eating, bathing, and dressing, to those with significant needs associated with Alzheimer's disease and age-related dementia. Our members are on the front lines when it comes to serving frail seniors providing 24/7 expert care, supportive services, dining, housekeeping, and myriad activities that promote wellbeing and social interaction. Senior living offers a valuable and much needed option for aging seniors and their families in need of care that is community based.

Worker Shortages are Critical, and the Impact is More Profound in Senior Living and Long-Term Care Communities

The senior living industry is facing an unprecedented shortage of workers. This shortage has been exacerbated by COVID-19. With the flood of retirements, childcare needs, and change of professions, we know this shortage will only intensify going forward given the characteristics of the U.S. aging population. People are living longer and requiring more care. The shortage of positions is across the board including direct caregivers, nurses, housekeepers, dining staff and more. In fact, long term care has been the hardest hit industry in the health care sector and continues to experience substantial job losses while according to BLS data, other sectors such as hospitals and physicians have nearly reached or surpassed pre-pandemic staffing levels.

These are hard jobs but very rewarding and meaningful. They are best suited for those with a passion for serving older Americans. It can be emotionally draining to care for those in the twilight of their lives,

share their frustration and fears, and still assure that they are getting the very best care. Without these caregivers, our seniors will suffer. The dedicated caregiver that works in our senior living communities are the unsung heroes of the American workforce. However, there are simply not enough native-born workers to meet the current and future demand and left unresolved will ultimately impact the ability to care for older adults.

With an estimated loss of 400,000 jobs in nursing homes and assisted living between February 2020 and March 2022, 10,000 people turning 65 every day and 70% of them projected to need some level of long-term care; and an estimated 11 million unfilled jobs in the U.S. in all industries; it is time to look beyond our borders and give immigration reform serious attention.

Key Reasons to Advance Immigration Policies to Bolster the Senior Living Workforce

- The United States is an aging nation. The growing number of older adults and increased longevity are the two primary factors spurring demand for long-term services and supports. The growing population of older Americans is driving the demand for caregiver and other front-line long-term care workers. By 2030, when all boomers will be 65 and older, they will make up 21% of the population, up from 15% today. There are simply not enough U.S. workers to take care of the increasing elderly population
- In contrast to the rapid expansion of the older adult population, the population of adults aged 18 to 64 is expected to remain relatively static, which means that there will be fewer potential paid and unpaid caregivers available to support older adults.
- There are more job openings today than people to fill them. Further it is expected that between now and 2028, the direct care workforce will need more than 1.3 million new workers. Longer term solutions must be prioritized in Congress especially as 10,000 people turn 65 every day, many of whom will likely need long term care as they age.
- Social Security and Medicare become more difficult to fund as the working-age population declines relative to the elderly population. The economic impact is significant unless steps are taken now to mitigate the risk posed to these programs.
- As the number of seniors needing long-term care expands, the number of family members available to provide that care is contracting — a consequence of baby boomers having fewer children than their parents.
- More than 6.2 million people aged 65 and older live with Alzheimer's today. By 2025, the number is projected to reach 7.2 million— a 16% increase. While the majority of these people receive care from family members and friends, approximately 40% of residents in senior living suffer from Alzheimer's or related dementia. Support must be available for these communities as well as family caregivers who without help, are at greater risk for anxiety, depression, and poorer quality of life than caregivers of people with other conditions.

It is Time for a Long-Term Care Worker Visa and Relief in Other Programs to Meet the Demand for Senior Care.

There are numerous nonimmigrant visa categories for people traveling and working in the U.S. but none of them are suited for the caregiver, dietary aid, med tech and other critical positions in the long-term

care industry. It is time that immigration reform be given the attention it deserves as a means of not only meeting the senior care workforce needs but to strengthen our overall economy.

There are many policy options on the table that should be pursued by Congress and/or the Administration that will address the workforce shortage in senior care. ASHA encourages your support for the following:

- (1) Create a visa category for the front line, in demand long term care worker,
- (2) Improve employment authorization for migrants who apply for asylum,
- (3) Expedite processing of work applications for those in the US and are in a status that allows them to work but are unable because of delays at DHS that are taking in some cases 8-12 months,
- (4) Create a pilot program within the existing H2-B visa category for same worker,
- (5) Include long term care workers in future allocation of unused "green cards", and
- (6) Grant DACA recipients and TPS workers permanent legal status.

Conclusion.

Throughout the pandemic, long term care, front line, essential workers have proven themselves to be a truly important part of our nation's critical infrastructure and crucial part of the backbone of our society. It is clear, we need to increase the number of workers to care for our seniors. There are many talented immigrants who are willing to enter the senior living or other long-term care sector but are faced with insurmountable roadblocks. These workers should be given the opportunity to make a career, a good living and a difference in their own lives and the lives of others. If we are to meet the expectations set for us, policymakers must act now to expand access to new pools of staff and take steps to encourage employment in long-term care.

We look forward to working with you on this critically important issue. Thank you for your consideration of our views and recommendations.

Sincerely,



David Schless
President & CEO